

Polo is catching on among horse lovers in Wasatch County

10-16-88
By SONNI SCHWINN

Wasatch County Correspondent
WASATCH COUNTY — Polo, known as the rich man's sport, has come to Wasatch County, but wealth isn't required in order to participate.

"They say it's a rich man's sport, but we play anyway," said Mike Proctor, who organized the New Silchar Polo Club, the first in Utah to be sanctioned by the United States Polo Association.

He said polo is so much fun that it's addictive, quoting from a polo pro: "I've heard of a lot of people getting into polo, but I've never heard of anyone getting out of it."

Proctor explained on the high level of polo competition, the field is triple the width and length of a football field, a little over nine acres. A player needs four to eight horses — thoroughbreds because of wind, conditioning and endurance — each with its own saddles and tack, to trade off during a game. That's what makes it the game of the rich.

But each member of the Wasatch County organization, the New Silchar Polo Club, is learning the game on whatever breed of horse and saddle he or she owns.

They also play on a scaled down field, and it is literally only a mowed, open field. Proctor said when the horses get tired, the game has to end. They play a slow game, not only because they are beginners, but also because the faster they play, the quicker the horses tire, and the sooner the game has to end.

"I don't think anyone's having more fun than we're having, even though they're spending more money," Proctor said.

The unusual name they have chosen, Silchar, was the name of the first organized polo club in history, in India. They thought it appropriate because

they are the first in Utah.

Proctor said the British discovered Indian calvary troops playing polo around 1880, took it to England and then to their holdings around the British Empire. Interest spread into the United States where it became the biggest sport in the country during the 1920's.

"It's coming back with a real vengeance, today."

Polo can be dangerous and there were probably a lot of serious accidents during its early years before the rules of the game were established.

The New Silchar Club has a five year plan. Proctor said it will take about that long to get indoor and outdoor arenas, build the membership, and for the members to develop their horses and their skills. But they'll have fun all along the way.

"We think Utah, particularly the Heber Valley, has the opportunity to establish itself as an equestrian area. Polo will just be another aspect of the total aspect of horses," he said.

Dr. Kitty Ferguson, another horse enthusiast in the county, said she is convinced that the horse industry could be an economic plus for the valley.

She is spearheading a drive to get an equestrian park, including polo grounds, in the Wasatch Mountain State Park. She reported the Mountnlands Association of Governments is looking for grants to finance the project. "I think this will fly someday."

"We don't foresee people driving up in Rolls Royce's — not in the foreseeable future," Proctor laughed. "They're going to be driving up in their pickup trucks and it's just going to be for fun, and that's the way we want to have it — if you like horses, and you like a good, competitive game, the exhilaration of moving down the field at 30 to 35 miles an hour and hitting the ball."